

Foreign Relations of the United States, 1948, General; the United Nations, Volume I, Part 2

Editorial Note

In a special message to Congress on March 17, 1948, President Truman, expressing grave concern regarding the situation in Europe, requested the reenactment of selective service to supply the authorized strength of the armed forces and the enactment of a universal military training program to provide for long term security. For text of the President's address, see Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: Harry S. Truman, 1948 (Washington, Government Printing Office, 1964), page 182, or Department of State Bulletin, March 28, 1948, page 418.

Means for fulfilling the manpower requirements of the armed forces in view of threatening international conditions had been under advisement since the expiration of selective service legislation on March 31, 1947. On June 4, 1947, President Truman transmitted to Congress "A Program for National Security, May 29, 1947, Report of the President's [\[Page 539\]](#) Advisory Committee on Universal Training," and urged early consideration of the subject; for text of the President's letter of transmittal, see Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: Harry S. Truman, 1947 (Washington, Government Printing Office, 1963), page 263. The House Armed Services Committee held hearings on UMT, but Congress took no action on the question in 1947.

The President's budget message, January 12, 1948, included a request for funds for UMT; for text, see Presidential Papers, 1948, page 19. Secretary of Defense James Forrestal recorded in his diary that at the Cabinet meeting of January 30, the Secretary of State "spoke with great vigor as to the necessity of the UMT Program.... Just as in the case of ERP, he pointed out that the money spent on the UMT program would convince the world that we were ready to follow through on our policy at all times and thereby would in the long run result in the saving of very large sums. Once the world was convinced of that fact, it would then be possible to begin the re-establishment of some kind of political balance and stability throughout the world." (Walter Millis (ed.), *The Forrestal Diaries* (New York, Viking Press, 1951), page 369) At the meeting of the National Security Council on February 12, Marshall, speaking in support of UMT, commented that the United States position in international affairs was that of playing with fire while having nothing with which to put it out (*ibid.*, page 373).

In early February, the retiring Army Chief of Staff, General Dwight D. Eisenhower, in a memorandum to the Secretary of Defense, asserted that unless means were found to maintain the strength of the Army, Germany and the Far East "would have to be abandoned to chaos and Communism." (*Ibid.*, pages 369–370.) On February 18, at the White House, Major General Alfred M. Gruenther, Director of the Joint Staff of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, made a presentation demonstrating the disparity between military strength and international commitments. The President, the Secretaries of State, Defense, and Army and the Joint Chiefs of Staff attended the briefing. (*Ibid.*, pages 374–377.)

In a memorandum to the Joint Chiefs of Staff, March 11, the new-Army Chief of Staff, General Omar N. Bradley, stated the following:

- “1. For some time the international situation has been deteriorating. Recent events in Czechoslovakia,¹ Finland² and Italy give every indication [\[Page 540\]](#) that the situation will further deteriorate. There is no indication that the U.S.S.R. will modify its aggressive efforts in the near future.
- 2. Under present unsettled world conditions United States forces may be called upon for service in areas considered vital to her security. In addition to obligations which this government may be required to meet on behalf of the United Nations, a future crisis may force the deployment of U.S. troops in Italy, Greece, Trieste³ or the Middle East. The present explosive world situation, with international frictions increasing, the possibility that the U.S. may increase on short notice the commitments which the National Military Establishment must fulfill, makes it mandatory that we retain always a mobile striking force to preclude enemy action. If U.S. troops are committed in those areas, it is essential that they be deployed in a strength and composition commensurate with their missions. Since such missions might well be of prolonged duration, it is possible that a large portion or all of the strategic reserve would be committed for a considerable period of time.
- 3. Although the European Recovery Program may have a beneficial effect on the U.S. efforts to counter the spread of Communist forces, there is no assurance that ERP alone will attain that end.
- 4. Dependent as it is upon the volunteer system of recruitment, the Army is short today 121,000 men of its present authorized strength of 669,000. By 31 December it is estimated that this shortage will increase to 167,000 despite all the intensive efforts in behalf of recruiting exerted by the Army. In the meantime, commitments and missions of the Army have remained heavy, resulting in a steady decline in the strength and efficiency of the occupation forces and the Army General Reserve, and the consequent inability of the Army to back up our country’s policies.” (811.2222/3–1148)

On March 2, Secretary Marshall, Lovett, Secretary Forrestal, and others conferred to consider means for expediting Congressional action on UMT (Millis, Forrestal Diaries, pages 384–385). Forrestal, on March 8, met with Senate Armed Services Committee, which voted unanimously to start hearings (ibid., pages 388–389). On March 12, the Joint Chiefs of Staff and Forrestal, meeting at Key West, Florida, concluded that UMT alone was not sufficient since it could not furnish necessary manpower fast enough. The conference decided to support immediate restoration of selective service. (Ibid., pages 390–393.)

On March 17, following the President’s message, the Senate Armed Services Committee began hearings on the overall military manpower problem. The statement that day by the Secretary of State included the following:

“The accelerating march of events in European areas has now made it clear that reliance for the future of those areas cannot be placed alone on the slow processes of reconstruction financed with our help. There is something more for the United States to do. We must show, [\[Page 541\]](#) conclusively, by

decisive legislative action, to all the nations of the world that the United States intends to be strong and to hold that strength ready to keep the European world both at peace and free.

Diplomatic action, without the backing of military strength, in the present world can lead only to appeasement We desire a state of affairs which would make repetitions of the fate of Hungary⁴ and Czechoslovakia, the intimidation of Finland, the subversive operations in Italy and France,⁵ and the cold-blooded efforts to destroy the Greek Government unlikely, because they would definitely be fraught with real danger to those who would attempt such action.”

Marshall stated that he saw no possible way financially to maintain a reasonable military posture except on the basis of universal military training. Necessary also, he said, in view of the rapid dwindling in the strength of the armed forces, was temporary application of selective service. For the full text of Marshall’s remarks, see the Department of State Bulletin, March 28, 1948, page 421, or U.S. Congress, Senate Committee on Armed Services, Hearings on Universal Military Training, March–April, 1948, 80th Cong., 2nd sess., page 3.

1. For documentation on the attitude of the United States with respect to the Czechoslovak governmental crisis of February and its aftermath, see [vol. iv, pp. 733 ff.](#)____
2. For documentation on United States interest in Finland’s relations with the Soviet Union and the threatened Communist seizure of power, see [ibid., pp. 759 ff.](#)____
3. For documentation on United States policy toward the Free Territory of Trieste, see [vol. iii, pp. 502 ff.](#)____
4. For documentation on United States concern regarding events in Bulgaria, Hungary, and Romania, see [vol. iv, pp. 279 ff.](#)____
5. For documentation on United States relations with France, see [vol. iii, pp. 592 ff.](#)____